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ABSTRACT

Effective production techniques for an ITV series, "Community of Living Things," are evaluated in this paper. The program is part of a junior high life science series. Five basic practices, chosen for their student interest and instructional value, were utilized: (1) rapidity of visualization, (2) few teacher appearances, (3) repetitive film sequences, (4) music (without narration), and (5) films (of animals and locations) and live animals. Narrative and statistical information supports these techniques as successful methods of sustaining interest in televised instruction. Evaluation data were obtained in February, 1971 from 30 teachers and their classes, representing nine Tidewater, Virginia, school districts. (BL)

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EVALUATING ITV PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES: COMMUNITY OF LIVING THINGS

What are effective production techniques for a given television series? How are these determined?

In an effort to determine effective production techniques for the junior high life science series, Community of Living Things, questionnaires were distributed five times over three years, to receiving teachers and students. Following viewer opinions, certain production practices were adopted or rejected.

All production practices were considered for two purposes: obtaining student interest, and instructional value; interest was the primary consideration. Written and oral comments of receiving students and teachers were last solicited in the spring of 1971. The following information and conclusions concern five specific production techniques as related to the most recent evaluation data.

Sample: Dated February, 1971, consisting of 30 teachers (and their classes), representing 9 Tidewater, Virginia school districts.

Technique No. 1	Evaluation
Medium to rapid visual pacing within the lesson	a. lesson moves too rapidly ..... 15 classrooms b. lesson moves too slowly ..... 1 classroom c. lesson moves at an acceptable pace ..... 13 classrooms d. no response ..... 1 classroom

In an effort to accelerate visualization and lesson potential boredom, static scenes were shortened. The scene length was edited according to action or movement of the camera. By purposely accelerating the pace, a clear majority of classrooms responded that the pace was either too fast or acceptable. Only one classroom felt the programs were paced too slowly.

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However, of those that indicated the programs were paced too fast, their overall comments included the following:

"all were well received and interesting," "T.V. much improved in the last few years," "all of the programs were interesting," "the lessons have been enjoyable," "this seventh grade science program is the best ETV program I've viewed and I might add the only one I've had students show any interest in," "most interesting telecasts I've seen," "students seem to enjoy as well as learn," "overall, the lessons were very informative and educational."

So the general conclusion is that rapid video flow is preferable to slowing down the presentation. By aiming for rapidity in scene changes, greater interest is generated in the receiving classrooms.

Technique No. 2	Evaluation
Few teacher appearances	a. desire more than two or three appearances in a lesson.....11 classrooms b. desire no more than two or three appearances in a lesson.....17 classrooms

In order to eliminate the "talking face" that often dominates the visual portion of a television lesson, the extreme of appearing "live" only once or twice was initiated. In addition, the filmed appearances were minimized. The teacher usually entered when there was danger of a lengthy static film scene, although it was often only his hand to provide motion, or a quick face shot to initiate a scene change. The teacher was used primarily as a visual to bridge between natural gaps in the presentation; if there were not any natural breaks, he appeared only at the onset of the telelesson. It was the opinion

that receiving teachers would feel "less threatened" and students meanwhile could observe more visual information, if the teacher's face were removed.

It is interesting that of the 17 teachers that preferred a minimum of teacher appearances, 10 indicated the curriculum by content, was more effective, and six reported it was as effective as the previous years' curriculum (ecological vs. traditional). Of 9 teachers that desired to see more of the television teacher, six indicated the curriculum was less effective than the previous year. The general conclusion is, those teachers that preferred the curriculum, therefore, those teachers that utilized the telelessons to a greater degree, were those teachers that preferred fewer appearances of the television teacher.

Technique No. 3	Evaluation
Repeating film sequences in several telecasts	Student reaction on seeing the film clip a second time: "boring" .....10 classes "more enjoyable".....13 classes "O.K." ..... 2 classes "no reaction"..... 3 classes "thought it was a mistake..... 1 classes

The repetition of filmed sequences was utilized for visual reinforcement while secondary purpose was to obtain multiple utilization of spectacular scenes. The "boring" comments were generated from above average students in many cases, while the average and slow groupings preferred the repetition. Comments included:

"they say they like this--also gives them better understanding,"

"most students feel the repetition enhances their understanding,

"They learn something new each time the film is shown," "the students can recall these experiences and tell you that they have seen these scenes somewhere before," "they know they have seen the film but profit from the reinforcement," "they recognized having seen it before and seem to know what to look for the second time around," "here again, advanced students are sometimes bored; slower learners are appreciative."

A general conclusion is that a good idea can be reutilized and be acceptable to a majority of viewers.

Technique No. 4	Evaluation
Music	a. prefer music (a minimum of several selections).....27 classrooms b. dislike use of music in telecasts..... 3 classrooms

Music was enjoyed by the clear majority of all viewers; the three receiving classrooms that disliked music stated:

"fair to poor," "music is an uncessary filler--not teaching," and "students for elimination of music during lesson."

On pursuit of why students did not prefer music, oral communication revealed that many students preferred more modern tunes, from "soul to hard rock," although most were willing to accept classical to popular sounds. Actually, the music was designed to fill an audio void while students observed visual selections. It was intended to increase interest in the program as well as allow for a break in the narration.

Favorable comments were: "enjoyable," good and lively, keeping students awake," "...fits the presentations," "could use more for emphasis..."

"...adds to the telecasts very much," "effective," "...is appropriate for the lessons and gets the students' interest." They perk up when this starts." "Excellent--great appeal for students." "I think the music reinforces ideas presented in the telecast." "Pleasant to listen to in the background."

Student critics orally asked why the same music was used at the onset of every telecast. It seems the repetitiveness of the opening theme became ineffective as the year progressed; but, in conclusion, music as both background and total audio tract, was desired by both receiving teachers and students.

Technique No. 5

Program largely film and live animals

Evaluation

Rank order of interest:

1	2	3	4	5	6	
2		2	2	13	6	Pictures
	2		2	4	17	Charts
7	6	6	6	2		Films
1	7	6	9	3		Experiments
12	4	7	3	3	1	Live animals
9	5	2	6	2	2	Teacher with animals and plants

It was clear that live animals, the teacher being with those animals (or plants), and film (of both organisms and field trips) were the preference of most viewers. The series utilized live animals, but relied moreso on closeup photography. This enabled students to gain new perspectives as well as increased the image size for those on the back row.

When the teacher was shown "live," every attempt was made to show him with the actual living specimens in the studio, before departing to film. This brought the film to the "present tense" and gave valuable size comparisons.

Over 30 field trips were included in the scenes, from garbage dumps to salt marshes. In these instances students were taken to places they may not have ordinarily visited, to view sights they may never have witnessed otherwise. Comments included:

"They enjoyed trips to the various areas and mushroom farms."

"...visits to laboratories where actual experiments are being performed." "Demonstrations with live animals and field trips extend our classroom limitations."

It is interesting and logical to note that pictures and charts were at the bottom of the visual choices. Seventeen out of twenty-five classes, for example, listed charts as the last visual they wished to be utilized; 13 of 25 indicated pictures were preferred only to charts. Receiving first considerations by a minimum of seven teacher in each instance: film, live animals, and teacher involvement with those animals, received top priorities as interest generators. These items were utilized extensively in the series.

When surveys in 1972-72 indicated the series was deemed an important contribution in 92% of receiving classrooms, its impact was related directly to these techniques.

SUMMARY

Utilizing five basic practices: rapidity of visualization, few teacher appearances, repetitive film sequences, music (without narration), film (of animals and locations), and live animals, Community of Living Things makes an effort to utilize effective production techniques; evaluations support these techniques as successful methods of sustaining interest in televised instruction.